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The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
455 12th Street Southwest
Washington, DC 20544

Dear Chairman Pai,

As former chairman of the Senate Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, I, along with other appropriators and Members of Congress, directed the Commission to review the accuracy of the rating system and function of the TV Parental Guidelines Oversight Monitoring Board. I appreciate the initiative you took to seek public comment and to respond to our request to review the system in a timely manner. I am confident this review will allow all stakeholders an opportunity to build a public record to provide Congress a balanced assessment of the issue.

As you know, more than 20 years ago, the TV Parental Guidelines were implemented to give parents a better idea of the content and age-appropriateness of television programming. Without question in past 20 years, a higher tolerance has grown for programming that contains violence, sexual content and suggestive language. Given the shift, the FCC should review the TV parental guidelines, so that parents and families can adequately evaluate television content based on an accurate rating system that is driven by content creators in a responsible manner.

Now more than ever before, children are exposed to new forms of technology and media that give them instant access to millions of programs, including television shows, videos, movies and advertisements. While the opportunity to freely access programs brings numerous benefits, it is understandable that many parents have concerns with the vast spectrum of content their children can now access. As such, I believe it is the responsibility of the TV Parental Guidelines Oversight Monitoring Board to review the rating system to accurately reflect today's programming.

This evaluation should include an explanation of the standard at each rating level, and why the Board considers it appropriate for an audience of that age. Programming creators have a First Amendment right to create content without interference from the government. I do not believe the government needs to enter the business of regulating the entertainment industry.

Program creators sometimes produce content to discourage racism, hatred, and injustice; they understand that their content can have positive effects. As a culture, we should also recognize the potential adverse effects of programming that includes violence, sexually explicit content and suggestive or explicit language can have on children's neurological and social development. Our nation feels the very real effects of increased violence and lack of respect for others, as demonstrated by the number of victims of sexual harassment and assault who have come forward in recent months. While all instances of violence, and sexual harassment and assault cannot and should not be attributed to television programming, a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics shows violence in media can be linked to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmedⁱ. While a rating may not stop the influx of these issues in society, it give families an opportunity have a conversation about appropriate content and media exposure for their children.

I would ask that when the Commission reviews the programming rating standard, there is also a review of the content in commercials created to advertise programming. During family-oriented or sporting events, commercial content can include scenes of violence, sexual content or offensive language. Should broadcast commercials match the rating of the program that it interrupts?

I hope you will agree that providing families easy and factual access to the oversight mechanisms that drive the rating system will give the rating system more integrity, and ensure accurate and transparent television ratings, so families have the ability to make an informed decision for their children.

Thank you for consideration of these comments. I look forward to reviewing the record and continuing our conversation on these important issues.

In God We Trust,



James Lankford
U.S. Senator for Oklahoma

ⁱ <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/124/5/1495>